

Biography

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DeLASHMET

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T. L. DeLashmet Sr. — He came here with a new perspective

By WILLIAM JOHNSON

"He came here with a new perspective, a new ability to see the dusty spots that nobody else could see. He brought with him some pretty practical knowledge. He had a broad view; he was not circumscribed by Moss Point."

That is how Arthur Smith, former Pascagoula postmaster and area historian, described T. L. DeLashmet Sr., a man who in his 60 years in Moss Point, has left his mark on this area.

A man who liked to get things done, DeLashmet was during one period in the 1920s simultaneously a member of the volunteer fire department, a city alderman, partner in the Moss Point Insurance Agency, an officer in the Mississippi Export Railroad, a developer and an employee of the Pascagoula-Moss Point bank, from which he later retired as vice president.

DeLashmet was born in a log cabin six miles outside of Houlka, Miss., in Chickasaw County on Jan. 7, 1884. As his parents had both died by the time he was four, and his two sisters and brother were raised primarily by a grandmother on a farm nearby.

His grandmother died when he was 15 and DeLashmet left the farm life that he was never too fond of, going to Memphis where he had relatives.

"When I arrived in 1899 Memphis was the biggest city I had ever seen. They had a big celebration then to commemorate the fact that their population had just topped 120,000," DeLashmet remembered.

Having always been a man who enjoyed working with his head instead of his brawn, DeLashmet liked the city and also the opportunity it gave him to get an education.

"I didn't have any schooling and in Memphis I went to school and night school," he said.

Later he continued his education by taking classes at the Eastman Business College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., where he studied bookkeeping.

While he left Memphis many times traveling all over the country in those years just after the turn of the century he always came back.

He had friends there and work was always available. By the time he left for the last time in 1910, DeLashmet had worked alternately as a clerk in a grocery store, with Western Union and with both the Southern and the Illinois Central railroads.

He remembers most vividly his work for the railroads.

"They had good trains in those days. I worked as a clerk in the office in Memphis and it was my job to help get all the trains through on their run between Chicago and New Orleans."

But DeLashmet's first experience in railroading ended with the yellow fever epidemic of 1905 when all the railroads in the south were shut down.

It was at this time that DeLashmet set off for Denver — by rail of course.

"It was nice traveling in those days. Every train had a Pullman car, and traveling was enjoyable. I left Memphis one night and was in Kansas City the next morning. We got into Denver the following day," he said.

DeLashmet was impressed with Denver, but the altitude,

coupled with the malaria he had caught years before, made the city a bit uncomfortable.

DeLashmet finally returned to Mississippi in 1910 after finishing up at the business college. His first job was on a plantation in north Mississippi, where he ran the company store and kept the books.

DeLashmet's dislike for farming helped keep him from getting overly attached to his job and also left a bad taste for the bookkeeping as well.

It was in his attempt to escape this job that DeLashmet set into motion the wheels that would eventually bring him to Moss Point and his permanent home.

DeLashmet was on his way to Mobile to take in the Mardi Gras festivities when he stopped in to visit his sister in Bexley, just north of Lucedale.

"She asked me what I was doing and I told her I was looking for a job as I was just about out of money. When I got back from Mobile she had a job all lined up for me in a lumberyard."

In those days lumbering was big business, with dozens of large lumbering concerns cutting timber to ship down the river to Moss Point, where the big saw mills cut it into lumber and shipped it out all over the world.

In the first part of the 19th century Moss Point was the largest city in this area and was known throughout the world for its lumber.

As with all of his jobs, DeLashmet learned fast and by 1914 he had risen to yard foreman and lumber inspector for the Greene County Lumber Yard, which was owned and operated by George Leatherbury of Mobile.

And then the bottom fell out of the lumber market. World War I had broken out in Europe and the sealanes were no longer safe for the ships that had carried Moss Point's lumber to the rest of the world.

Being temporarily out of work, DeLashmet volunteered to help his sister and her husband, Dr. R. C. Eley, move down to Moss Point.

While the Eleys set off across the cattle paths that passed for roads in their Ford, DeLashmet came down on the train with a carload of household goods and furnishing.

DeLashmet had planned to only stay a few weeks to help his sister get settled, but the yard didn't reopen and so DeLashmet got a job as an assistant to the postmistress, Miss Hattie McCloud.

He and Miss McCloud made up the entire postal service in Moss Point then.

"Things were a lot simpler," he said; "there was no parcel post and there was no home delivery; everyone had a box at the post office."

Even so, DeLashmet remembers that the little community of 1,500 did send out and receive a lot of letters.

In 1917 America joined the War and DeLashmet decided he wanted to go to Europe and do his part to fight the Kaiser.

"But I only weighed 118 pounds and they wouldn't even give me the physical. They would just put me on the scales and tell me I had to weigh at least 135 pounds and then tell me to go away."

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T. L. Delashmet

"I tried to join everything but the Marines and they all turned me down. I remember a friend of mine was heading up a unit that was being sent to France to cut trees for the army and I tried to get him to take me along on the basis of my experience as a lumber inspector.

"That didn't work either, and I guess it's just as well. His ship was torpedoed in the English Channel and he had to swim to shore. I probably would have drowned though; I never was a very good swimmer."

Missing the boat to World War I was in many ways the best thing that ever happened to DeLashmet.

After being turned down he went to work for that new shipyard, Ingalls, that had just opened up to supply ships for the war.

But so many young men had gone off to war that a labor shortage was developing and W. B. Herring, owner of the Pascagoula-Moss Point Bank, came to see DeLashmet.

"He had heard I was a bookkeeper and asked me to come to work for him. I told him I had been trained as a bookkeeper but that I didn't like it. He gave me this sob story and I finally told him I'd come to work for him on a temporary basis."

The temporary basis lasted for 30 years and three months and saw DeLashmet rise from teller to vice president in charge of the Moss Point bank.

It was also about this time that DeLashmet met the young and beautiful Ione Broome, who was to become his bride in 1919.

She had graduated from Moss Point High School with the four other members of her class in 1914 and was working in a doctor's office.

The two young people attended the First Baptist Church together and often traveled in the same circles.

At that time Moss Point had quite a social life with the rich saw mill owners often throwing parties. There was also the Warfield Theater in Pascagoula. But probably the attraction that drew the most young people was the old Beach Park in Pascagoula.

Instead of having to fight your way through the oyster shell streets a group could catch the street car and ride down to Pascagoula.

There were often plays at the pavillion, or a band so couples could dance. There was also an amusement park and the beach was available for those who wanted to swim; but by far the biggest attraction was simply bringing a picnic lunch and sitting on the grass, visiting with friends and neighbors.

"It was different then. You knew everyone in town. I remember when I knew everyone from the coast to Lucedale, both black and white, by their first names. Now if I meet five people on the street I consider myself lucky if I know two of them," DeLashmet said.

Another thing was different, too. There was no early warning system for the hurricanes that ravaged the coast from time to time.

"I had gone down to the beach park for the 4th of July

celebration in 1916," DeLashmet remembers. "It was kind of windy but besides that we didn't suspect anything. I remember I had taken a girl with me to the big celebration and when I dropped her off that evening I told her I would see her the next day. It was two weeks before I could get across the branch of the river to her house, as a hurricane struck the next morning.

"What was funny about it was that the next day after the storm we got a telegram from the weather service warning us a storm was coming."

It was shortly after DeLashmet was married that the big fire broke out in Scranton.

The 1921 blaze so seriously damaged the city that Scranton, in effect, ceased to exist and was eventually absorbed by Pascagoula.

The fire might have been a lot worse, though, had it not been for the Moss Point Volunteer Fire Department.

DeLashmet was a member of the department and remembers the fire vividly.

"They didn't have any water pressure in the city and they couldn't fight the fire. We had a new engine that could pump water out of the river and so we set up the unit to battle the blaze.

"We had over 3,000 feet of hose out and they told us the fire was out of control and we had to fall back. I told them that we had to cut the fire off before it spread further and that we were not going to let it get past us.

"I told the men to keep the hose where it was and we stopped it right there. The old fire station we were at was burned in half but the fire didn't get past us."

Two years later DeLashmet was elected alderman for ward two and he was later elected to two more terms.

He remembers the city as full of problems back then but nothing out of the ordinary. "It was just a sleepy little town," he said.

Eventually in 1928 DeLashmet resigned his post on the board when his business partner George Wood was elected mayor.

"I just felt that it was improper for both of us to be on the board so I resigned."

From his recollections the board has changed little in the 50-odd years since then, with the board dealing with both major and minor matters and the personalities that made it up.

"I remember there was one man on the board who was against everything. Someone once asked me if I didn't think it would be a better board without him and I told him no. Since the man was always against everything sometimes he was right and sometimes he was wrong. Besides, we needed a man like that for balance."

DeLashmet had first met Wood shortly after he had come to Moss Point and the two of them formed a friendship that has continued through two generations.

"Mr. Herring had an insurance agency and he offered me half the stock in the company if I would run it for him. I took it and formed a partnership with George Wood who was at that time bookkeeper for the Dantzler Lumber Company.

"At first we ran the agency in our spare time, working at night. Then the agency began to grow and we hired a girl to work in the office. Soon it was a flourishing business."

This partnership continued through the years — a partnership based on trust and mutual liking. Today, the agency has continued to the second generation. It is now operated by DeLashmet's and Wood's sons.

An illustration of how the partnership operated can be seen in a comment by DeLashmet about the business.

"I bought land and property, but I didn't even know sometimes I was buying it. Wood would tell me 'we just bought this land.' I would ask him where would we get the money to pay for it and his answer was that was his business."

It was also shortly after this that DeLashmet returned to one of his old passions, railroading.

DeLashmet was active in the group that organized the purchase of part of the defunct Alabama-Mississippi Railroad and created the Mississippi Export Railroad.

A few years later DeLashmet was elected secretary-treasurer of the company, a position he still holds.

Over the following years DeLashmet remained active in community life, eventually being elected president of the city Rotary Club, becoming a trustee of the First Baptist Church and rising through the ranks as a Mason.

Now at 90, DeLashmet has retired from most the many jobs and organizations with which he has busied himself over the years and spends most of his time with his wife Ione in their home at 728 Main St.

Those who remembers him say he was always a controversial man, a title that still fits him today. When talking about the future of Moss Point, Ione stops to interrupt him from time to time, warning him not to say anything libelous.

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FISK

Rebecca D. Fisk, 44, of Brookhaven, Miss., born Dec. 1, 1957, in Pascagoula, Miss., died Sept. 4, 2002, at Oschner Hospital, New Orleans, La.

She was a graduate of Mississippi College, a homemaker and a member of First Baptist Church in Brookhaven.

She was preceded in death by her mother, Dorothy Suthoff Delashment.

Survivors include her husband, John Fisk, Jr., M.D., Brookhaven, Miss.; son, Stephen L. Fisk, Brookhaven; father, T. L. Delashment, Jr.

Moss Point, Miss.; brothers, T. L. Delashment, III, Moss Point, E. Dickson Delashment, Meridian, Miss.; and sister, Sally D. Scordino, Moss Point.

Visitation was Thursday, Sept. 5, from 5 to 8 p.m. at First Baptist Church in Brookhaven. Funeral service will be Friday, Sept. 6, at 11 a.m., also from the church.

Burial will be in Riverwood Memorial Park.

Memorials may be made to Lupus Foundation or First Baptist Piano Fund.

Arrangements by Brookhaven Funeral Home, Brookhaven, Miss.

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